

My adventure racing adventures

Finally fit I was looking for something new and exciting to do. After a bit off googling and then a bit more, I came across the Dare You Adventure - City Raid website. YaY! I hadn't missed it ... it was January and the race was still coming up. So after convincing my husband to join (I believe it was a matter of 'we should do this' and he said 'done ... paid yet?') we entered. Another friend of mine ended up joining in too and we had a fabulous night – rain and all.

At the end of the City Raid, there was some mention of an 'adventure race' for women. Hrm ... what is this adventure race thing? So home I trotted and yep ... Google here I come! After a bit of research I discovered that I had no idea how to kayak, no idea how to ride a mountain bike and had not been on a push bike more than twice in the last 10 years; but hey, it looked like something I would love. Next to find an unsuspecting female to join me!

In the meantime, I had talked so much about it that I had my brother hooked on the idea of adventure racing and signed up for a race in May 2012.

Finally ... an old school friend that I had reunited with this year (playing soccer) became my 'victim'. She was quick to tell me how she didn't know how she'd go but that she would give it a go. So before she could back out I quickly registered. I tasked her with thinking of a team name while I filled out the rest of the form. Before she came back to me I had already entered us with a "what were we thinking" team name. Seemed quite apt at the time!

Now we were registered ... technically that made us committed right? And maybe now it was time to dust off the bikes and learn how to mountain bike. We figured kayaking would either come naturally or we would 'sink' (haha – literally!!).

My other adventure race with my brother was quickly upon me. We had prepared well ... I had been playing soccer, he was running a bit and we both joined a mountain bike club (for one day) and had a crash course in mountain biking. We both enjoyed ourselves immensely and were totally hooked! Other than the mountain biking crash course; the only other time I went out with my bike was to put it into my car and taking it for a service. The bike mechanic asked me how I planned on using the bike to ensure I had the right tyres, to which I responded "2 adventure races and nothing else".

I had great ambitions. After the first race in mid May I decided that I needed to work on my mountain biking. So I mentally planned to attack riding a bike. Unfortunately planning and action is not the same thing and on the 1st of July I asked my friend "is it too late to start riding the bike?"

Luckily for me, my unsuspecting friend (the one that had signed up with me) had also not touched the bike ... actually I think the first time she sat on it was on 5 July! But don't fear we were still more concerned about the kayaking than the bike riding.

As soon as we found out the location of the race, we booked ourselves some accommodation for the night before. We stayed just down the road at a caravan park and thankfully the park owners

offered their showers for use post-race before trekking back home (we live between Brisbane and the Gold Coast).

Race day:

We arose at about 7 to be at HQ by 7:30. Once we got there we were greeted by a string of cars parked down the street. Yep, our warm up was trekking up the hill with the bikes in tow to register.

At registration we were excited to discover that we got a shirt and a bandana. We felt like we had already got our money's worth at this stage alone. A day out without the kids (she has 1 and I have 4) AND a shirt!! And not just any shirt but one that we can actually wear again (not white)!!

After ditching our bikes, off we went to mark our map up with pretty (highlighter) colours. Thankfully we had brought extras to ensure we didn't have to use colours that clashed with the map colours (something I learnt from my first and only other adventure race).

My friend by this stage was a little more stressed and went to fill her camelback up (which we quickly discovered was broken) while I did the loo-dash. Much to my surprise, I think this was the first time there was a bunch of women together and NO queue for the toilets!

Race start:

Off we went ... running like we wanted to beat someone ... or something! I think we just got caught up in the race. For the first kilometre I recall a lot of comments behind us saying "hey, your camelback is leaking". I believe my friend was well aware of this considering her shorts were saturated but thanked everyone for letting her know none-the-less.

The first 5 checkpoints seemed to go very smoothly. Then we struck a snag. We took a few different tracks to the right on our way to checkpoint 6 (D on the map) and kept arriving at some 'ceremonial circle' thing. We gave up and went to go back to the main track but discovered we were on the correct track somehow (pure fluke). With the 6 checkpoints done, we raced back to HQ to head towards the kayak.

We were told that we were first to go out on the kayak ... a somewhat scary thought – only because we had trained SO MUCH (note the sarcasm). We planned to do checkpoint 16 and then head back to 13 but quickly changed our minds when we discovered the current was running very quickly north; meaning we would need to paddle up-stream across the dam.

Again we quickly had checkpoint 13, 14 and 15 done but struck a few problems getting back to the kayak. We thought we were heading the right way until we saw someone kayak past us; so we turned around and double-guessed ourselves. This cost us time and it turned out that we were about 20 meters from the checkpoint (13) when we turned around. Once back in our kayak we quickly got checkpoint 16 and headed back to HQ again.

Back on dry land and it was 'kayak out, panic in'! The bike leg! The leg I knew would be not just the hardest but the longest too!!!!

Quickly we sped off to checkpoint 1. We changed our minds from going via the narrow route (past the running checkpoints) to heading straight for the freeway and heading past checkpoint 2 to get to it. We feel that we made the right decision when we ran into a group of 6 women (3 teams) that were just at checkpoint 1 (and had not yet been kayaking). Then through the tunnel we trekked. As to be expected, this was the highlight of the race. We waded through the water and then bubble bubble bubble ... disappeared underwater at the other end. Well ... our bikes did anyway. My friend was quick to point out the gigantic spider that was hanging out next to our heads in the tunnel too!

Then we struck sand. OMG the sand was painful on the legs and there was so much of it! We walked up the hills and peddled everything else that we could. The 6 women we saw at checkpoint 1 were near us the whole time. Checkpoint 3 down and my friend and I decided to go on our 'alternative route' while the other women trekked down the wrong road. From this point we saw no-one for a seemingly long time!

Checkpoint 5 - what a disaster! We found the creek crossing and bush bashed north east. Nothing! We decided maybe it was the wrong creek and rode down the road another few 100 meters ... nope ... nothing ... go back! By the time we got back the 6 women had turned the corner at the top of the hill, spotted us (I believe) and came to visit. Then, with the 8 of us together we managed to find the checkpoint. We all feel that the checkpoint was more East than North-East but we had the little marker on our cards and a massive smile that we could leave it behind!

The next road to the left was the plan ... checkpoint 6 here we come! Eeer ... no maybe not! We went to turn left when we discovered it said "PRIVATE PROPERTY – KEEP OUT". I thought "I value my life ... don't need to get shot today. Must be the wrong road" so we kept riding. After a massive debate the other teams agreed and followed us.

Unfortunately, this wrong judgement cost us a lot of time and we ended up going down the wrong road which resulted in us arriving at checkpoint 6 from the wrong direction. Checkpoint 6 – DONE! Up the road for another run leg – here we come.

The run leg was tiring but I was happy to be rid of that bike for a bit. We had decided to do V, Z, W and U (in that order). This theory was on the fact that at least when we had done 2 of them we were already 'heading back' rather than still heading away from 'home' (the bikes). We once again lost the group of 6 somewhere before V but after getting lost again before Z we met them again.

Unfortunately there was a track to the left that we thought was on the map but later discovered it wasn't so we hadn't walked far enough to find Z. We decided to take the advice of staff at HQ and "trust our compass" so we went further down the road. This was the last time we saw the lovely group of 6 women.

After Z, we had the other 2 relatively quickly and were heading back to the bikes. (Relatively because there was a lot of walking and super-slow-motion jogging involved).

Once back at the bike, we were advised to 'skip' checkpoints 9 – 11 and head straight for 12.

This was a little disappointing because it meant we didn't quite finish the race, but at the same time, we were not about to argue with good advice! By this point my friend was really struggling and was living on a water drink bottle and my Powerade and had already worn her whole camelback water since the start of the bike leg.

Having been on the track a number of times already, we quickly found our way back to the tunnel. Through it we trekked and a nice walk up the grassy hill towards home. Another win – we found her missing water bottle on the grass hill! Once at the top of the hill, we got on our bikes and I'm not sure what it is about 'going home' but my friend took off. She had her 10th wind (I'm sure we were past our 2nd by this stage) and she was GOING HOME! Across the finish line and dump ... down go the bikes, bags and water bottles! There was no way we were going further than we had to.

Food time and relax! Great! Love it! What a fantastic meal and drink. We quickly phoned home to tell them that we survived and then went down the road to put our bikes away before the rain came.

I am still totally hooked on the sport! It is now Wednesday following the race and my friend has recovered and I think she is definitely keen to join me on the next women's adventure race.

I would like to thank everyone that organised the event and my fellow competitors and most of all, my friend that said yes so I could be part of it all.

I do feel that the team at Dare You Adventure organised a fantastic event. I liked that staff were ready to help teams if they requested it. I do recall hearing one staff member telling a team which way they thought was the best way and which direction that was in from where they were. Another staff member told us where we were on the map when we had stopped at an unmarked track (lucky we thought we were exactly where they said we were). It was a great way to get women into the sport and I hope to see it on the calendar again next year.

The only recommendations I would suggest is

- a) Mark which north it is on the map (for those that have a race or two before but not enough to guess)
- b) Add the contour lines on all the maps

I understand the contour lines were not that important for this race being a beginner's race which stuck to many main tracks, but it did help when deciding which direction to run. And would have been helpful when finding out if it was going to be a long uphill section or not on the bike.

Suwati